DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 434 222 CE 079 207

AUTHOR	Espie, Rod; Viola, Josie
TITLE	A Place for Political Literacy in Adult Education.
INSTITUTION	National Languages and Literacy Inst. of Australia, Melbourne. Adult Education Resource and Information Service.
SPONS AGENCY	Adult, Community, and Further Education Board, Melbourne (Australia).
ISSN	ISSN-1035-6932
PUB DATE	1999-09-00
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ARIS, Language Australia, GPO Box 372F, Melbourne, VIC 30001. Web site: <http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/language-australia/aris>.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT	ARIS Resources Bulletin; v10 n3 p1-4 Sep 1999
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Adult Education; Adult Educators; *Citizenship Education; Educational Objectives; English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Law Related Education; Partnerships in Education; *Political Socialization; Professional Development; *Role of Education; Teacher Improvement
IDENTIFIERS	*Australia; *Political Literacy

ABSTRACT

The accredited course "Understanding Our Legal and Political World" was developed by the Victoria Law Foundation after a 1994 national survey into awareness of civics in Australia confirmed the need for basic political literacy programs at all levels of instruction, including adult education. To date, the course has been offered by a diverse range of providers ranging from correctional institutions in Victoria to a remote aboriginal community in North Queensland. In 1998, a teacher from the Council of Adult Education's (CAE's) English as a second language department and a teacher in CAE's general education department began working together to increase adult education providers' access to the Australian Electoral Commission's (AEC's) educational resources. After providing professional development courses for primary and secondary teachers for some time, the AEC has now joined with the Victoria Law Foundation to provide adult educators with professional development activities in explaining the constitutional issues surrounding the mechanics of Australia's existing referendum system and introducing tasks and activities that teachers can modify for their respective adult learners' needs. The response to these professional development courses for adult educators has provided convincing evidence that there is a significant place for political literacy activities in AE. (MN)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 434 222

BULLETIN resources

aris

September 1999 Volume 10 Number 3

A Place for Political Literacy in Adult Education

by Rod Espie and Josie Viola, Education Officers at Electoral Education Centre, Melbourne

In September last year this journal published an article (Vol. 9 No. 3), on Rod Quantock's "Separation of Powers" bus tour. The tour was sponsored jointly by the Victoria Law Foundation and the Australian Electoral Commission as a contribution to Constitutional Awareness Week 1998. Both these bodies have continued to progress the provision of civics and citizenship education in the adult education sector. The purpose of this article is to update readers on these developments, as well as flagging another Separation of Powers tour later this year.

The accredited course - "Understanding Our Legal & Political World"

One of the objects of the Victoria Law Foundation is:

> "to promote or undertake within Victoria community education in law and the legal system ..."

In 1994 the Keating government commissioned the Civics Expert Group to conduct a national survey into the awareness of civics issues within the Australian polity. The resulting *Whereas the People* report revealed that:

> "Only 19 per cent of people have some understanding of what Federation meant for Australia's system of government. Only 18 per cent know something about the content of the Constitution. Only 40 per cent can name the two Federal houses of parliament, and only 24 per cent know that senators are elected on a state-wide basis. Sixty per cent have a total lack of knowledge about how the Constitution can be changed, despite having voted in referendums."

Whereas the People led to the current *"Discovering Democracy"* programme for primary and secondary schools and the comparatively small section of this programmes' budget allocated to the adult education sector went to the provision of study circle kits. While these study circle kits look like providing a most valuable resource, the Victoria Law Foundation identified the need for specific civics & citizenship (Discovering Democracy) courses for adult students.

The resulting *"Understanding Our Legal & Political World"* course was accredited by the Vocational Education & Training Board, after extensive trialing across a range of adult education providers. Providers can apply to ACFE for funding to provide it as a General Preparatory Course or it can be run as a module in a Certificate course. So far, there have been more than 150 requests for the accreditation document and courses have been provided and interest shown by a diverse range of

Continued on page 2

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J Kurdle
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

UE 019207

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

providers - from correctional institutions in Victoria to a remote aboriginal community in North Queensland. Annie Woodger initiated this project for the Victoria Law Foundation; the accreditation document was written by Helen Kimberley. Rod Espie developed the course and conducted the pilots.

Joint Ventures by the Victoria Law Foundation and the Australian Electoral Commission

In 1998 Rod Espie and Josie Viola commenced working together. Josie teaches at the Council of Adult Education (CAE) in the ESL Dept. and has considerable expertise in curriculum development and the competency requirements. Rod teaches in the General Education Department at CAE. In addition to these roles, they both work as part-time Education Officers at the Australian Electoral Commission's Electoral Education Centre (EEC) in Melbourne, and as adult education consultants to the Victoria Law Foundation.

The Australian Electoral Commission (AEC) has taken an educative role for some years. The aim of their education centre is;

> "To achieve increased public understanding of and participation in the electoral process."

Part of our role with the AEC has been to increase the access to their education resources by adult education providers.

The first step in this process was to customise the presentations at the Education Centre to suit adult groups. As teachers of adults we all know the frustrations and embarrassment experienced when we take our students on visits to institutions which are geared to secondary students, sometimes making concessions to adult education by putting adult labels on material designed for children. With this in mind, we also prepared workbooks specifically for General Education and ESL students. These were designed by Josie and Philippa McLean, from the CAE, to meet the competency requirements at the various levels of the CSWE and CGEA. A visit to the EEC can be incorporated to provide a springboard for developing assessable units of work within these certificates.

The AEC has been providing professional development (PD) courses for primary and secondary teachers for some time and has now joined with the Victoria Law Foundation to present professional development for teachers in the adult education sector. As educators we are all aware of the valuable flow on effects of civics education in schools, but adults are actually voting now - or will be once they take citizenship - and the benefits of voter education for an informed electorate are immediate.

Professional Development for the November Referendum

Australians will next vote at the Referendum in November this year. The issues around this possible change to the Head of State are the subject of the PD we are currently providing.

This PD has two aims:

1. To cover the constitutional issues around the way the existing system works, the mechanisms to change it and what a new system might look like.

2. To introduce and workshop exercises specific to these issues which satisfy key competency requirements of the CGEA, CSWE, the National Reporting System, and the learning outcomes reflected in the philosophy of ACFE's *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities* framework.

We have found that this two-pronged approach works well. Teachers are, to some extent, politically literate but some have more detailed understanding of the constitutional and electoral machinery than others. At the completion of this PD course, teachers feel they can tackle the technical issues around November's referendum in their classes accurately and with confidence. Points covered include, the meaning of Constitutional Monarchy, the separation of the roles of Head of Government and Head of State, the position of the Queen and the Governor General in the Constitution with reference to "convention," Westminster influences and the reserve powers, the structural constraints to the passing of referendum questions and a consideration of the proposed models for change.

In addressing the second aim of the PD, we have found that this subject matter can be used to meet competency requirements of various curriculum frameworks in many different ways. Teachers are presented with tasks and activities they can modify to their respective learners' needs, and the workshopping process enhances their scope considerably. This process also reveals new and novel ways of introducing the subject matter when the technical content of the PD is discussed by teachers.

Just one example of these class activities presented is a numeracy exercise based on the two majorities required for the passage of a referendum question, ie. a majority of votes in a majority of states. Students are presented with a list showing the number of registered voters nationally with a breakdown of these in each of the six states. They then calculate the absolute majorities (50% of the formal votes plus one) required for the question to pass in any given state. By adding up the absolute

majorities of the three states with the smallest number of voters'(WA, SA and Tasmania), they can calculate that approximately 12% of national voters, situated in those three states, could theoretically prevent the passing of a referendum question even if it receives an absolute majority of votes Australia-wide. The task has been designed to cater for learners applying basic numeracy skills. It can also be completed by learners who are ready to analyse and interpret figures.

At the completion of this numeracy exercise students are frequently puzzled by the referendum provisions and have questions about their origin. This opens up discussions about federalism, the history of federation, the 1967 referendum, the way states' constitutions are changed and many other related issues. It can be used at CGEA levels 2 to 4+ and integrates other class activities which satisfy oracy and literacy competencies. A copy of the exercise is included (on page 5) and may be reproduced for teaching purposes.

A Place for Political Literacy in Adult Education

Our involvement in teaching civics and citizenship in recent years and particularly in this year's PD courses for teachers in the adult sector convinces us that there is a significant place for this subject matter in the adult education curriculum. More than 100,000 students take part in further education courses in Victoria and a good number of them are interested in gaining a better understanding of the political and legal systems. This material can be incorporated into CGEA and CSWE courses and in communication skills modules in vocational courses. A high proportion of teachers of this type of course have a lot of discretion about the subjects areas they cover, but frequently feel constrained by a lack of confidence in their understanding of this material and uncertainty about ways of using it to comply with the competency framework or other assessment criteria.

There is a great deal of written and on-line information available, presented in a straightforward and accessible style by bodies such as the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, the Victoria Law Foundation, the Australian Electoral Commission, the Parliamentary Education Office in Canberra and the Victorian Parliament. All this material complements the Adult Learning Australia (ALA) study circle kits to be released later this year.

Newspaper articles and TV news and current affairs segments can provide excellent springboards to covering issues in class. Once these stimulate the students to ask questions, the issues can be addressed at the appropriate levels of complexity. The numeracy exercise around the double majority is just one of

GETTING STARTED WITH CONFIDENCE

PRICE $24 plus POSTAGE

ISBN 0731126 73 4 106pp

IDEAL FOR STUDENTS AT LEVEL 4 OF THE CGEA

This preparation for further study course enables learners to build personal skills for communication with others and improve understanding about human behaviour in interpersonal relationships both at home and at work.

The topics focus on women's experiences but could be adapted to mixed gender groups. The resource covers the Oral Communication and General Curriculum Options Streams of the Certificates in General Education for Adults.

Published by Language Australia Ltd. for the Eastern Metropolitan Council of Adult, Community and Further Education

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

many possibilities. Looking at the balance of power in the Senate and the GST can take students into the Parliamentary process. Consideration of sentencing issues and victims' rights goes to the basis of our legal system, and a visit to the Magistrates Court stimulates questions around presumption of innocence, bail and remand.

Metropolitan based adult education teachers are fortunate in the number of resources available to them outside the classroom. The Magistrates, County and Supreme Courts all have public galleries and provide for group tours. This also applies to the State Parliament and with perseverance, a teacher might be able to arrange a visit to question time through the electoral office of their MP. The Australian Electoral Commission's Education Centre provides presentations and role plays of the electoral process for adult students of all levels. The City of Melbourne runs tours of its heritage listed building which also explain its historic role in the democratic process.

The term "civics and citizenship education" is now frequently replaced by "discovering democracy". We support any change of name which describes course content in a more meaningful way and frequently use "political literacy" to describe the outcomes of what we teach. Literacy, in its broader meaning, is the core of General Education and ESL studies, and this particular subject area is rich in resources to use in language and communication courses, General Curriculum Options such as Media Studies and Australian Studies. Achieving a degree of political literacy should also take the learner in directions which embrace the learning principles of *Transforming Lives, Transforming Communities*. De-mystifying the governmental and legal process will provide the learners with a sense of their place as an individual in the "bigger picture," connecting themselves with other individuals, their community, and the democratic process. Extending the learners' critical intelligence is a natural outcome of understanding the political process, thus transforming the individual's capacity to be a better informed, confident voter as well as an active citizen.

'If the individual is not first a citizen then the obligations and privileges which go with that status are effectively lost and the person to all intents and purposes ceases to be an individual.' John Ralston Saul .

Another Separation of Powers Tour in the ALA Conference December 1999

There will be a 'Separation of Powers' bus tour incorporated in the activities of the Adult Learning Australia National Conference in Melbourne from 2nd to 4th of Dec. 1999. The tour will take place on Fri. Dec. 3rd and can be taken as a separate activity or as part of a range of activities, on the theme of 'Discovering Democracy for Adults', covering the whole three days of the conference.
Hosted by the 'Comedian General' Rod Quantock - the tour will cover most of the day with a guided visit to the courts in the morning, a presentation by the Australian Electoral Commission in the early afternoon followed by a parliamentary role play presented by Canberra's Parliamentary Education Office in the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Assembly Chamber.

Conference participants wishing to pursue the 'Discovering Democracy for Adults' theme on other days can attend a workshop on December 2nd covering the themes of this article and another on December 4th to be presented by the authors of ALA's learning circle kits.
For further information regarding any of the activities or conference events, contact conference organisers:
Aurora - Ph: (02) 9688 5558.

For further information on the Electoral Education Centre and resources available to adult education programs, please contact Rod and/or Josie at the:
Electoral Education Centre
565 Bourke St, Melbourne 3000
Phone (03) 9285 7188
Fax (03) 9614 6328
www.aec.gov.au

Footnotes:

1. Victoria Law Foundation Act. 1978
2. Whereas the People - Civics & Citizenship Education - Report by the Civics Expert Group AGPS Canberra 1994
3. Electoral Education Centre, 565 Bourke St Melbourne 3000 Ph: (03) 9285 7188
4. Provided acknowledgment is made to the source, teaching institutions are permitted to copy the material provided for teaching purposes. The material is not to be otherwise copied or sold without the written permission of the Victorian Law Foundation. For further details contact: Victorian Law Foundation, 8/224 Queen St., Melbourne VIC 3000. Ph (03) 9602 2877, Fax (03) 9602 2449. Enquiries to Annie Woodger at anniew@dot.net.au
5. Saul, John Ralston 1995 'The Doubter's Companion: A Dictionary of Aggressive Common Sense' Penguin.

Please take the time to complete and return the enclosed ARIS questionnaire.

The ***ARIS Resources Bulletin*** is the quarterly journal of the Adult Education Resource and Information Service (ARIS). Resources are reviewed by language and literacy professionals. If you would like to be part of the review team please phone Robyn Hodge at Language Australia on (03) 9926 4779.

ARIS, Language Australia GPO Box 372F, Melbourne, VIC 3001.
Fax: (03) 9926 4780. Email: aris@la.ames.vic.edu.au

ARIS's home page on the Internet is at:
http://sunsite.anu.edu.au/language-australia/aris

Material contained in the ***ARIS Resources Bulletin*** does not necessarily reflect the policy of the Adult, Community and Further Education Board or Language Australia.

Adult Education in the Community

© ARIS, Language Australia 1999

Editing & Production: Robyn Hodge, Melva Renshaw, Jan Hagston (Kindler) & Jenni Oldfield

ISSN 1035-6932

ARIS is jointly funded by the Adult, Community and Further Education Board of Victoria and Language Australia.